

The Rumored Campione

Asuka Tokunaga is in first year of high school.

She lives in the Nezu Sanchoume in the Bunkyo ward in Tokyo, a lively shopping district which leaves a strong small-town atmosphere.

The aura of the Showa era that was left here and there wakes a curious feeling of nostalgia.

Asuka works part-time in a family restaurant a little separated from that district.

A common place chain restaurant.

But because it is next to the main street, it is still thriving. It was early October when she saw a certain old friend during work.

On the first day of a long weekend, past eight o'clock in the morning.

Asuka was on morning shift and serving the customers.

Her long-time friend had not entered the store as a customer, but was killing time out front, holding a large bag. It looked like he was waiting for someone.

Godou Kusanagi.

Written in Kanji, every character needs a large amount of strokes, but that's the name of her friend.

He was tall and had quite pretty features, but because of the unsophisticated feeling he gave off, you wouldn't exactly call him good-looking.

Asuka knew him since kindergarten.

Because he was waiting where he was, he must have arranged to go somewhere by car.

Despite his ordinary looks, Godou had many unusual acquaintances. From time to time he used the pretense of job to help such acquaintances with their work. Certainly that day must've been the same, Asuka thought and returned to her work.

However, moments later, she suddenly found Godou surrounded by girls.

Furthermore, each of these four girls were either cute or just beautiful. There were even 2 beauties from abroad mixed in, one blond and one silver-haired!

"That guy... Looks like he's become quite a player lately. He wasn't that bad before! Unbelievable, to think he'd fall that quickly..." Asuka hissed, deciding to teach him a lesson.

Meanwhile a mini van came to a stop in front of Godou.

Her childhood friend plus the four girls got in and drove away.

"...Wasn't that Godou-san just now?"

"Mariya-san and Erica-san, as well as Liliana-san were with him, right? Meeting early on the first holiday and leaving by car... I wonder where they are going."

Asuka overheard that quiet conversation.

Looking for its source she saw her fellow part-time workers. Miyama-san and Sawa-san were whispering to each other.

Like Asuka they were in first year of high school. Until a moment before, their eyes had been directed outside the family restaurant, where Godou and the girls had been.

Then Asuka understood.

She had heard before that those two were going to the nearby Jounan Academy.



"Sawa-san, Miyama-san, do you happen to know Kusanagi Godou?"
Asuka asked them out of the blue.

It was past one o'clock. The morning shift was over and they were in the changing room now, switching out of their cute uniforms into street clothes. Being asked all of a sudden, Sawa-san and Miyama-san blinked with surprise.

"Well, we do know him, but...", Sawa-san nodded cautiously.

With the thin-framed glasses, she looked most intelligent.

"But how come you know him, Asuka-san? You're not going to Jounan, are you?" Miyama-san asked in return. She was of short stature and plain adorable.

Actually, she was so child-faced you could mistake her for an elementary school child.

"I'm from the same area, a shopping district nearby. And I went to the same elementary and middle school, too."

"So... you're childhood friends?"

"With that Kusanagi-kun?"

Sawa-san already started going into it while Miyama-san was completely surprised.

"Yes. I won't call it the regret of my life, but it has been rather unfortunate to be stuck with that idiot for so long. By the way, Miyama-san, what did you mean with 'that Kusanagi-kun'?" Asuka asked with a cold smile on her face.

It had been half a year at most since they had entered high-school.

Had her old friend gained such a reputation in such a short time?

"Could you please think about it for a moment? Since I've known him for so long, I'd like to know what preposterous things he's been up to. Depending on the situation, I'll have to discipline him a bit..."

"I think it started around May," Sawa-san started calmly.

They had changed locations to a lively Japanese tea house in Nezu Sanchoume - Asuka's and Godou's home neighborhood.

"Until then, Kusanagi-kun had not stood out very much. Well, his face is okay and he is tall, so one girl or another might have been interested in him, but all in all he did not stand out. But ever since Erica-san came, everything has changed."

Sawa-san spoke distinctly and in an educated tone.

Apparently her intellectual glasses weren't just for show.

"Ever since that extraordinarily smart and athletic blond beauty who's fluent in Japanese on top of it showed up, coming all the way from Italy to chase after Kusanagi-kun, he has completely changed. Or perhaps his hidden abnormality has just come to light."

"And after Erica-san, Mariya-san from our class was next..."

Bit by bit, Miyama-san also started talking.

Unlike Sawa-san, she spoke hesitantly. Kusanagi Godou's behaviour was just that far out there.

"Mariya-san is always so graceful, like a young lady, but before anyone knew it, she was already clinging to Kusanagi-kun like a maiden in love. They seemed like they would elope at any moment. But that Kusanagi-kun didn't settle with just two girls, no...!"

"Another girl, Liliana-san, came here from Eastern Europe because of him as well."

According to them, this one was a fairy-like beauty with silver hair.

Asuka nodded.

A blond girl and a Yamato Nadeshiko^[1], as well as a silver-haired girl. It sounded like the girls she had seen outside the restaurant earlier.

"And there seems to be yet another girl from some other high school who sneaks onto our campus to see him. We often spot a girl around him in a uniform different from ours."

"So you see, Kusanagi-kun is a king in the middle of a harem of at least 4 beauties, maybe even more, so to speak. They call him the biggest monster since the founding of the school. But strangely enough, the girls don't seem to hate him for it."

"Maybe because he looks harmless at first glance and kind in some way...?"

"He doesn't have a strong presence during everyday life which might cause the girls to overlook it. Although he still seems to make a part of the boys extremely jealous of him."

The situation became clear for Asuka and she nodded again.

The smile on her face was a bit powerless.

"I see... so he went for quality over quantity since entering high school."

"Qua... quality over quantity?"

Asuka's absent-minded murmuring was interrupted by Miyama-san.

"14."

"Eh?"

"The number of girls in middle school who had fallen for that quiet, unsociable guy. Well, there may be more who I don't know of... And when you include the boys, it adds up to even more. Ohh, don't get the wrong idea. The last one is in the sense of camaraderie, not romantic love. Although in the baseball club with Godou there was that boy, Rui, who was quite border line..."

"EHH?"

Asuka's muttering flabbergasted Miyama-san. Sawa-san, too, was all ears.

"T-That's interesting. Just how did he manage to do that...?"

"There was nothing about it. He's just always had a way with a part of the girls and a part of the boys. But going into details now would take too long and it's bothersome, so let's do that some other time."

Asuka was making a sour face.

"Damn Godou. He doesn't seem like he's popular in class or school, but that appearance is deceiving. Even worse, he's completely oblivious to the girls who fall in love with him and tells them stuff like 'You're such a dear friend'. Unbelievable!"

Getting unintentionally worked up, Asuka's fist strikes the table.

"That sure is amazing... by the way, Asuka-san, are you also in love...?"

"...w... with Kusanagi-kun... or..."

"Huh?! Are you stupid!? Who'd fall for such a blockhead! You see, as his childhood friend I can't forgive him for causing all that trouble in our district or at school, okay? No misunderstandings, please."

"So that's how it is. Good going, Kusanagi Godou..."

"Right, it's so obvious... and kinda clichéd?"

During Asuka's unintentional outburst, Sawa-san's and Miyama-san's expressions had turned knowingly.

Both of them were focusing on Asuka.

On her two pigtails that, while a bit childish, Asuka herself is quite proud of. Her piercing eyes. Her slightly sharp features.

Sawa-san and Miyama-san were taking in all that and then nodded at each other.

"Hey, Asuka-san. Do you ever regret acting all rash and stand-offish in front of somebody you like?"

"A-as if I would! Don't make such weird accusations!"

"But the basic question is still why Kusanagi-kun is so popular."

"He's not super hot and he's neither a flirt nor does he impress by working really hard."

Once Asuka had calmed down, Sawa-san and Miyama-san continued.

"I-isn't it because he's being raised by the ultimate playboy? With the best possible teacher right next to him, his natural talents or a kind of fate of being popular forever must have awoken, something like that?"

Just when Asuka was carelessly answering, that teacher caught her eye.

The three were still in the Japanese tea house.

Outside was still Nezu Sanchoume.

And down the street came quite the handsome old man. He was wearing an elegant linen jacket and he obviously must have looked stunning when he was younger. Just by walking down the street, people in shops here and there called out to him.

"Maybe... is that the one who taught Godou-kun?"

Noticing the direction of Asuka's gaze, Miyama-san guessed and was spot-on.

"That's right, grandpa Ichirou, his grandfather."



"Well, he does seem to be really popular, but what makes him such a playboy?"

"Uhm, how do I explain this...?"

It was when Asuka was pondering on Sawa-san's question.

Ichirou Kusanagi, the head of the Kusanagi family, walked right past the front of the tea house. He noticed her staring at him from the inside and responded with a wink. An unimaginable greeting for a Japanese man of his age. It was neither repulsive nor cold -- just the right balance.

He was someone able to do this completely naturally.

'No less from you,' Asuka thought when the tea house's phone suddenly rang. The lady at the counter (who also knew Asuka and Godou since infancy) picked it up.

And while Asuka in thought, the lady already came over.

She placed a plate of kurizenzai^[2] usually made for the Obon-festival on the girls' table.

"Auntie, we didn't order this."

"Hehe, it's fine. Ichirou-san called just now and asked me to give them to you."

"Grandpa Ichirou did!?"

"Yep. You had such a serious expression so he wanted to get you something to cheer you up, he said. He was worried his grandson was giving you some trouble."

In just the instant of walking by, he had understood that much.

And although he quickly ordered over the phone and on tab, the old waitress didn't make an upset face even for a moment. If anything, she looked so happy that she could be of help to him, she must have been pleased instead.

Furthermore, there were 3 portions of kurizenzai on the table.

He had even thought of Sawa-san and Miyama-san...

"And well, seeing how he can pull this off with room to spare just shows how good of a playboy Grandpa is."

"...I think I just had a revelation."

"...Chip off the old block?"

"That grandpa is the one who's looked after Godou since he was a child. And since he took Godou out to all kinds of places, how he dealt with the different kinds of people they met must have lodged itself deeply into Godou's young mind."

According to Godou's own stories, there were various events in his past.

For example when he encountered an old lady who his grandfather had "some episodes" with. Or when he met a middle-aged woman who had a crush on his grandfather long ago. Or about that drinking party with someone indebted to his grandpa who had evidently strayed from the right path. Or maybe when his grandfather flew to some remote region in South America to help out an old friend of his...

"He grew up seeing any amount of those stories and the skills that made Grandpa Ichirou so generally popular. They were carved into him, right down to the bone. That's what makes him so absurdly popular... or so I think from time to time, even if it sounds ridiculous..."

She couldn't determine whether she was right or wrong. It was just a guess of hers.

"...but... there is one thing I'm worried about. And it seems likelier and likelier that it's going to happen in the near future," Asuka said while poking the kurizenzai with her chopsticks. "You see, that idiot has internalized his grandfather's skills since he was a little brat. Even if he doesn't realize what he can do right now... What if he gets used to girls and wants to be popular by himself?"

When Asuka finished mumbling, the others had guessed what she meant.

"I-I see... With the know-how of his grandfather who is this good inserted into him, once Godou-kun starts using it out of his own accord...", Miyama-san follow up timidly.

Apparently the short girl was quite perceptive.

"E-Even now he's playing with girls like some devil king, and you talk about him adding the wives of that unbelievably popular grandfather? Wouldn't that turn him into a genuine monster?" Sawa-san tensely added.

"Not only I, but his little sister Shizuka and his deceased grandmother have also been worried about this since long ago."

Sawa-san and Miyana-san had realized a fear about the near future Tokunaga Asuka and a part of the Kusanagi family's women had borne for a long time.

Thinking about where Kusanagi Godou had gone over the long weekend, the girls let out long sighs.

References

1. ↑ Yamato Nadeshiko: Ideal Japanese woman according to old standards. Beautiful, elegant, subservient.
2. ↑ Kurizenzai: some kind of Japanese sweet made with soft beans and chestnuts

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